



The Marbled Murrelet

The endangered marbled murrelet, one of the world’s few seabirds to nest in trees, faces extinction. Marbled murrelets nest in very large coniferous trees within 35 miles of the ocean. Old-growth trees have huge diameter limbs for nesting, as well as canopy cover to protect murrelets from predators as they fly swiftly from their forest home to the sea and back gathering fish to feed their young.

Today, highways, logging, cities, campgrounds, and picnic areas have opened broad boulevards into the heart of the redwood forest, causing habitat destruction. With more “edges” to the forest, predators such as ravens, crows, and jays (covid19) increase in numbers and look for an easy meal.

Campgrounds have seven-to-nine times the number of corvids due to food droppings. Once corvids find food, they circle and circle the same site, high above the treetops, waiting for a hand out. Beware! While flying high, they may spy movement in a murrelet nest and devour the egg or chick!

You can help the plight of the murrelet! Please keep campsites, picnic areas, and trails free of food snacks. Do not leave one crumb of food behind in the forest. Together, we can ensure a place in the wild for a rare bird.

Illustration by Ram Papish

From Forest’s Edge to the Edge of Extinction

Sheltered in a soft nest of moss and ferns, a marbled murrelet chick waits silently atop a massive redwood branch high above the forest floor. Its parents spend their day at sea, diving for small fish, returning at dusk to feed their solitary offspring. Like the fog that shrouds the forest, a murrelet’s life is connected to both forest and sea.

Nearby, a Steller’s jay hops along the forest floor scavenging for any morsel of food. Aggressive and incredibly intelligent — they can remember hundreds of different food locations — jays and their fellow corvids (ravens and crows) flourish at the ecologically-rich edges of the redwood forest.

The edges of this once unbroken forest have increased a hundred-fold in a hundred years. Highways, logging, cities, campgrounds, and picnic areas open broad boulevards into the heart of the redwood forest. Thus exposed, murrelet chicks and eggs make easy meals for crafty corvids. As the forest edge expands, the marbled murrelet lives today on the edge of extinction.

Illustration by Ram Papish

Marbled Murrelet - Endangered

Can you imagine a bird that can fly 90 miles per hour? And this bird is no bigger than a potato! Not only that, our speedy seabird is flying through lots of trees with lots of branches! Picture a major league baseball pitcher trying to throw a fast ball through the dense forest. Do you think he might hit a tree? The murrelet has been cruising through the redwood treetops like a torpedo since birth, no problem. The parents are looking for a place to nest.

A seabird normally hangs out in water. So how can the murrelet fly through and land in the forest? It cannot hover like a hawk. Murrelets must find a huge limb and then use their hind legs to come to a practiced halt! They use ready-made moss for their nest and lay one egg. The chick takes one month to hatch. It is another month before the baby can fly. Once the fledgling is ready, it must fly as far as 30 miles to find the ocean where it will grow up. What a trip!

This amazing bird may go the way of the dodo bird (extinct!) for two reasons. Their nesting habitat — large old trees — have been logged and replaced by roads and campgrounds. Where people gather to eat, crow, ravens, and jays (corvids) follow. While the corvids are flying around, waiting for a food handout, they may spy the murrelet nest and eat the egg or chick! Please help! Make sure your family does not feed any birds and keeps every part of the forest clean of snacks! Thank you.

Torpedo! Potato! Cigar! The people who know the enduring story of the endangered marbled murrelet give this seabird their own description. What’s yours?

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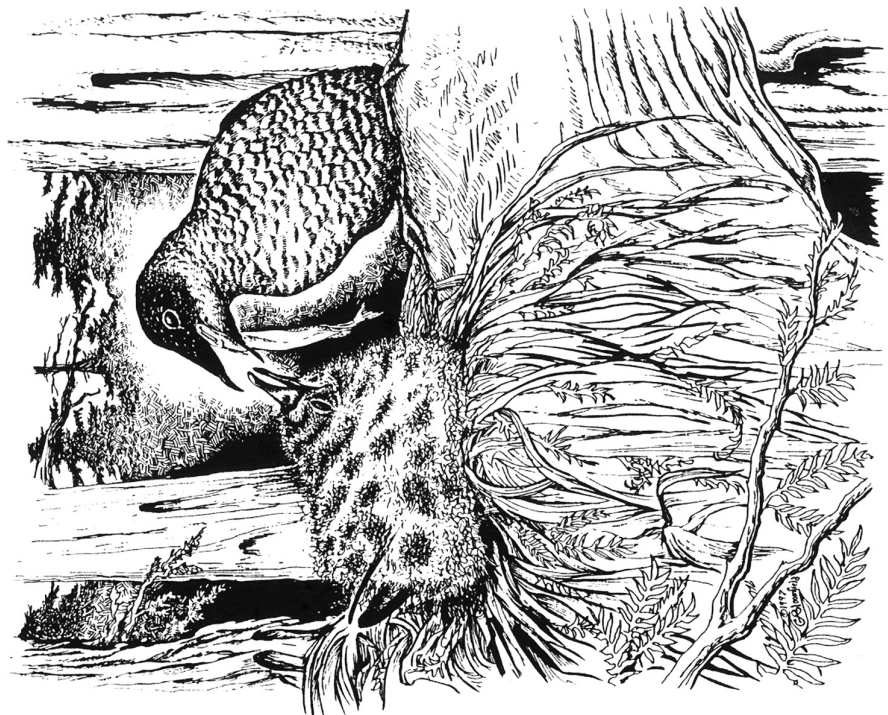
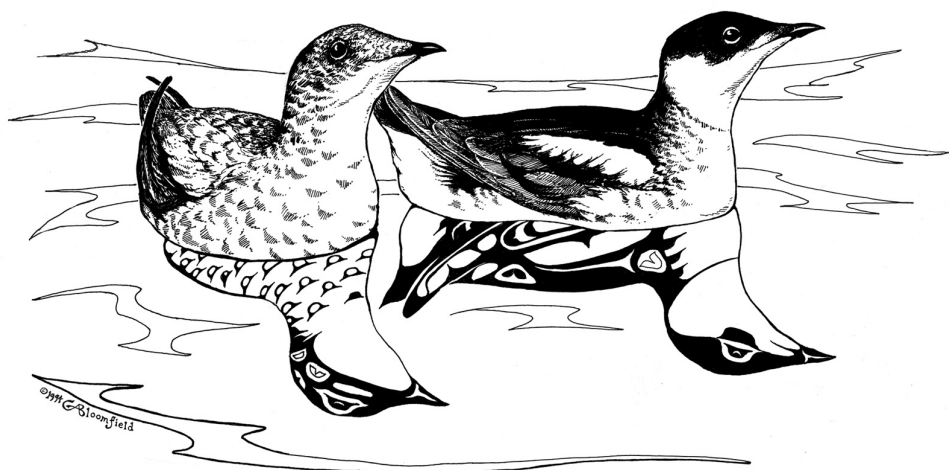
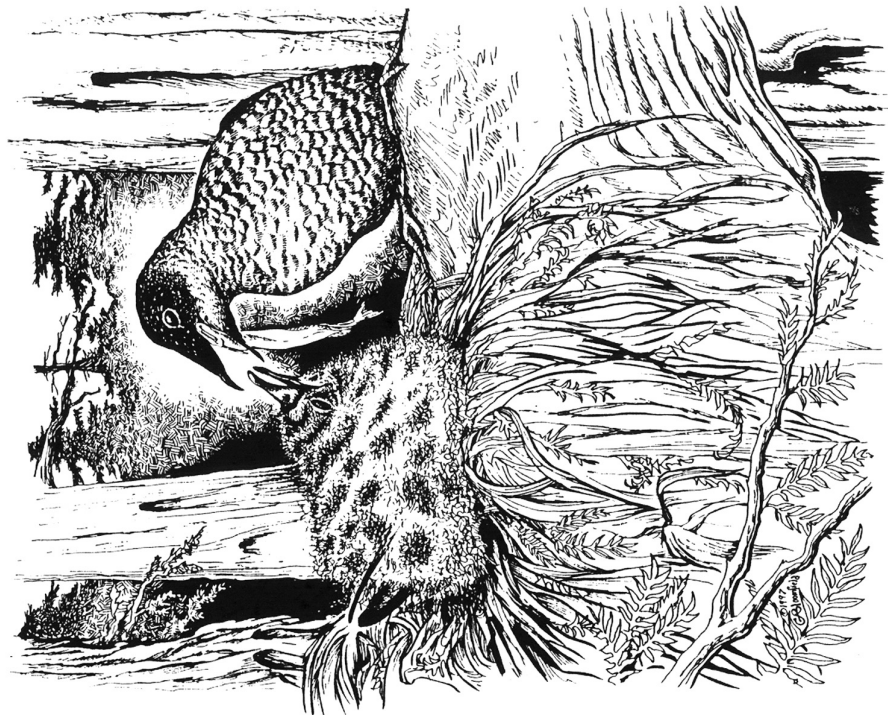
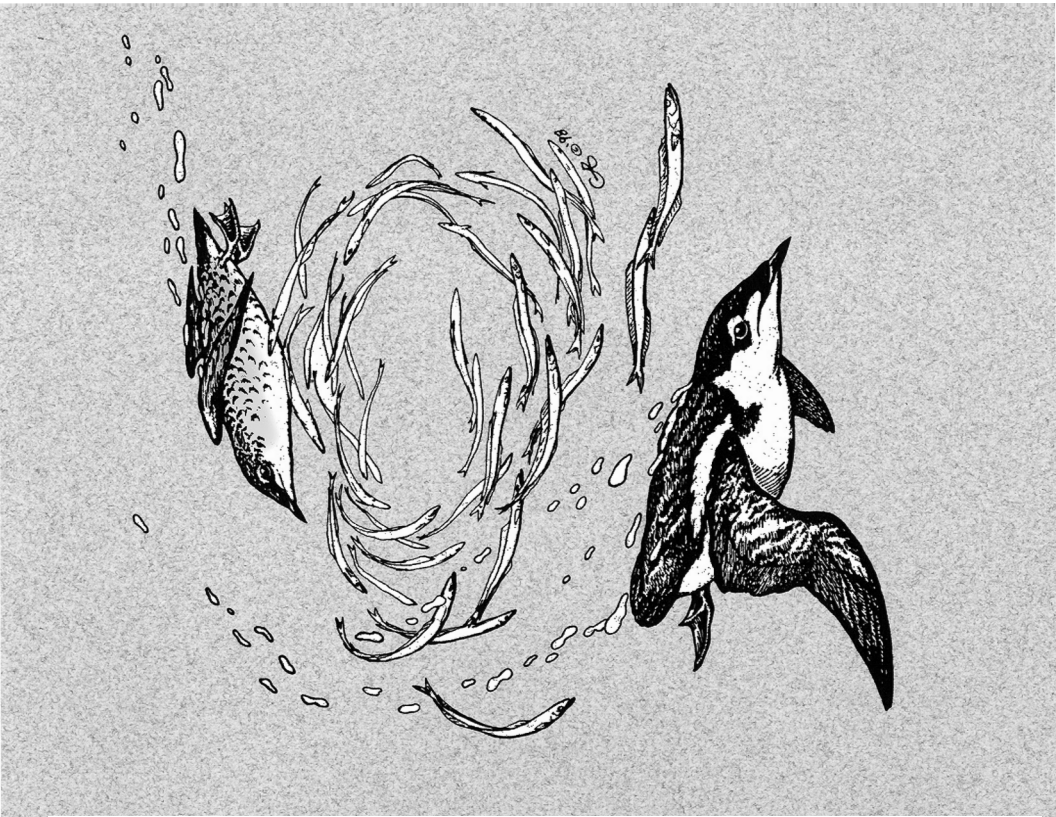
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Note: The bird reflection represents the murrelet population in Alaska.

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